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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000909

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KGOV](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: DAILY STAR JOURNALIST'S PASSPORT RETURNED

Classified By: A/DCM DCMcCullough, reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On May 11, Daily Star journalist and Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher Tasnim Khalil was detained by Directorate General Forces Intelligence (DGFI) for questioning about alleged anti-state activities, including blog entries and articles he wrote critical of the government. Since his release on May 13, Khalil has been in hiding with his family while his editor and diplomats have tried to facilitate the release of his passport. After receiving his passport from DGFI on June 5, Khalil is now preparing to leave the country. END SUMMARY.

ARRESTED, BEATEN, ACCUSED OF SEDITION

¶2. (C) Tasneem Khalil, a 26-year old Bangladeshi who works as a Daily Star journalist, Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher and occasional CNN stringer, was taken from his home on May 11 by officers from the Directorate General-Forces Intelligence, the military intelligence agency. According to Khalil, during his 36 hours in DGFI detention, he was interrogated about "anti-state" articles he has written and was accused of being an Indian spy. He was released on May 13 after having been severely beaten and forced to "confess" to a variety of crimes on camera. He was badly shaken by the experience, and went into hiding with his family out of fear he would be picked up again.

INCREASING PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS

¶3. (C) Khalil had been worried about being arrested for some time. In April, POLOFF met twice with Khalil and his Human Rights Watch colleagues to discuss threats against him and Daily Star editor Mahfuz Anam by DGFI. On April 30, Khalil met with diplomats from the US, UK, Australia and Canada and described the pressure DGFI was putting on journalists during the state of emergency. Khalil claimed DGFI forced the Daily Star to retract its April magazine insert because of an article he had authored in it critical of the government. He also described constant phone calls from DGFI "handlers." When he and several colleagues from the paper were summoned to DGFI in April, his editor went instead, saying anything published by the paper was ultimately his responsibility.

DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTION, COORDINATION

¶4. (C) After his release from DGFI custody, Khalil, his wife, and their six-month-old son went into hiding. Two part-time HRW researchers (both the spouses of diplomats in Dhaka) met with Embassy officers on May 14 to describe what happened and request assistance in getting back Khalil's passport. The HRW researchers were reluctant to approach the government directly, opting instead to work through a few key embassies. They also expressed concern that if the case became more high-profile, it might further jeopardize Khalil.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador raised the issue with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Chowdhury, DGFI Counterterrorism Director Brigadier ATM Amin (who Khalil asserts was present during portions of his interrogation), and the Press Advisor to Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed. The British, Australians, and Canadians also raised the issue. We also contacted Daily Star editor Anam and encouraged him to approach DGFI regarding the passport. In subsequent meetings with the HRW researchers, they expressed concern over Khalil's safety, and said they were concerned that even if he were given back his passport he might not be allowed to leave the country and could have charges filed against him.

6 (C) On May 30, Khalil and his family were moved to another location after his hosts became alarmed at a perceived increase in police presence around the house. The next day, Embassy raised the issue of the passport with DGFI again, as did the Australians. At the same time, the Canadian High Commissioner contacted Anam and again urged him to make an overture to DGFI.

PASSPORT RETURNED, KHALIL FREE TO LEAVE
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¶7. (C) According to HRW, Anam organized a meeting between himself, Brigadier General Amin and Khalil at his home on June 4. Khalil was given back his passport, and told he was free to depart the country. HRW told POLOFF that Khalil has not yet decided what he will do, but they expect him to leave the country with his family very soon. HRW said the organization has offered to bring him to India temporarily and employ him there until he felt comfortable returning to Bangladesh.
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